What is claimed is:

1   1.   A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:

2   receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data identifies an

3   item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and

4   determining a reward for the potential buyer based on the intent data.

1   2.   The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2   receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer.

1   3.   The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2   receiving a payment identifier that identifies an electronic currency.

1   4.   The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

2   issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and

3   applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer if the potential

4   buyer does not purchase the item within the particular time period.

1   5.   The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of:

2   calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a value of the

3   reward.

1   6.   The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty comprises the

2   steps of:

3   receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the

4   particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;

5   and

6   applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer, wherein

7   the partial penalty is less than a total penalty charged when the potential buyer fails to

8   purchase the item within the particular time period.

1   7.   The method of claim 4, wherein the step of applying the penalty to the potential

2   buyer comprises the steps of:

3   receiving a confirmation that the potential buyer has purchased within the

4   particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to purchase;

5   and

6   applying a partial penalty to the financial account.

1   8.   The method of claim 1, wherein the intent data received from the potential buyer

2   includes a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item

3   within the particular time period.

1   9.   The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

2   receiving a confirmation when the potential buyer has purchased the item within

3   the particular time period.

1   10.   The method of claim 1, wherein the particular time period is specified by at least

2   one of the potential buyer and a central server.

1   11.   A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:

2   receiving a description of an item a potential buyer intends to purchase within a

3   particular time period, the description having a degree of specificity;

4   receiving a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase

5   the item within the particular time period;

6   receiving a payment identifier of a financial account of the potential buyer;

7   determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on at least one of the

8   degree of specificity, the degree of certainty, and a length of the particular time period;

9   and

10   outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer.

1   12.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:

2   receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the

3   item within the particular time period.

1   13.   The method of claim 12, further comprising the steps of:

2   determining whether the confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer

3   has purchased the item within the particular time period has been received; and

4   applying a penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer when the

5   potential buyer has not purchased the item within the particular time period.

1   14.   The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:

2   calculating the penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a

3   reward associated with the reward offer.

1   15.   ·   The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of certainty is monotonically related

2   to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of certainty corresponds to a

3   greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of certainty corresponds to a lower valued

4   reward offer.

1   16.   The method of claim 11, wherein the degree of specificity is monotonically

2   related to a value of the reward offer, such that a greater degree of specificity corresponds

3   to a greater valued reward offer and a lower degree of specificity corresponds to a lower

4   valued reward offer.

1   17.   The method of claim 11, wherein the particular time period is monotonically

2   related to a value of the reward offer, such that a smaller time period corresponds to a

3   greater valued reward offer and a greater time period corresponds to a lower valued

4   reward offer.

1   18.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   determining whether the potential buyer accepts the reward offer; and

3   issuing the reward to the potential buyer if the potential buyer accepts the reward

4   offer.

1   19.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased the

3   item after the particular time period; and

4   applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   20.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased

3   within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to

4   purchase; and

5   applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   21.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   receiving a confirmation signal after the particular time period indicating that the

3   potential buyer purchased the item within the particular time period; and

4   applying a partial penalty to the financial account of the potential buyer.

1   22.   The method of claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

2   receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer purchased

3   within the particular time period a similar item to the item the potential buyer intended to

4   purchase; and

5   updating a database to indicate that no penalty has been applied to the financial

6   account of the potential buyer.

1   23.   A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:

2   determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an

3   item within a particular time period;

4   retrieving an applicable penalty from a penalty database; and

5   applying the applicable penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1   24.   A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:
2   determining whether a potential buyer has fulfilled an obligation to purchase an
3   item within a particular time period;
4   calculating a penalty, wherein the calculation takes into account a price of a
5   reward offered to the potential buyer in exchange for the obligation to purchase the item
6   within the particular time period; and
7   applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1   25.   A method for applying a penalty, comprising the steps of:
2   (a)   determining whether a particular time period in which a potential buyer
3   intends to purchase an item has expired;
4   (b)   repeating step (a) until the particular time period has expired;
5   (c)   calculating a penalty; and
6   (d)   applying the penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer.

1   26.   The method of claim 25, further comprising the steps of:
2   (e)   receiving a confirmation signal indicating the potential buyer has
3   purchased the item after the particular time period has expired; and
4   (f)   refunding a portion of the penalty to the financial account.

1   27.   A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:
2   receiving intent data from a potential buyer;
3   generating a reward offer associated with a reward for the potential buyer based
4   upon the intent data; and
5   issuing the reward to the potential buyer.

1   28.   The method of claim 27, wherein the intent data includes at least a description of
2   an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period.

1   29.   The method of claim 27, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer

2   within a particular time period but before the potential buyer purchases the item.

1   30.   A method for identifying potential buyers, comprising the steps of:

2   (a) receiving intent data from a potential buyer intending to purchase an item

3   within a particular time period;

4   (b) associating a financial account with the potential buyer;

5   (c) determining a reward offer associated with a reward based on a value of the

6   intent data;

7   (d) outputting the reward offer to the potential buyer;

8   (e) determining whether the potential buyer accepts the offer;

9   (f) modifying the offer if the potential buyer rejects the offer;

10   (g) repeating steps (d) through (f) until the potential buyer accepts the offer;

11   (h) issuing the reward to the potential buyer; and

12   (i) receiving a confirmation signal indicating that the potential buyer has

13 purchased the item corresponding to the intent data.

1   31.   The method of claim 30, wherein the intent data includes one or more of a

2   potential buyer identifier, a description of the item and a degree of certainty with which

3   the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time period.

1   32.   The method of claim 30, wherein the value of the intent data is based in part on

2   one or more of a degree of specificity of a description of the item, a degree of certainty

3   with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item within the particular time

4   period, a length of the particular time period, and a reputation rating of the potential

5   buyer.

1   33.   The method of claim 30, wherein value of the intent data is based in part on the

2   reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:

3   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;

4   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within

5   particular time periods;

6   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously confirmed purchases

7   within particular time periods;

8   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties,

9   types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

10   cost of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

11   a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and

12   a value of demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1   34.   The method of claim 33, wherein demographic information includes at least one of

2   address, income and age.

1   35.   The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of:

2   determining whether the confirmation signal is valid; and

3   applying a penalty to the financial account if the confirmation signal is invalid.

1   36.   The method of claim 35, wherein the step of determining whether the

2   confirmation signal is valid includes one or more of the steps of:

3   verifying a potential buyer identifier;

4   determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular

5   time period; and

6   determining whether the new item purchased by the potential buyer is related to

7   the item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1   37.   The method of claim 35, wherein the penalty is calculated based on a value of the

2   reward.

1   38.   The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of updating a database to

2   reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1   39.   The method of claim 30, wherein the reward is issued to the potential buyer by

2   shipping the reward to an address specified by the potential buyer.

1   40.   A method of storing information reflecting that a confirmation signal has been

2   received from a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:

3   receiving an identifier of the potential buyer intending to purchase an item within

4   a particular time period;

5   receiving the confirmation signal from the potential buyer indicating the potential

6   buyer has purchased the item;

7   validating the confirmation signal; and

8   updating a database to reflect that the confirmation signal has been received.

1   41.   The method of claim 40, wherein the step of validating the confirmation signal

2   includes at least one of:

3   verifying the potential buyer identifier;

4   determining whether the confirmation signal was received within the particular

5   time period; and

6   determining whether the item purchased by the potential buyer is the same as the

7   item the potential buyer intended to purchase within the particular time period.

1   42.   A method for rewarding a potential buyer, comprising the steps of:

2   offering a reward to a potential buyer for inputting a description of an item the

3   potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period; and

4   issuing the reward after the description is input.

1   43.   An apparatus for identifying potential buyers, comprising:

2   a central server coupled to one or more input devices for receiving intent data

3   from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes a description of an item the

4   potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time period,

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5   the central server operable to determine a reward for the potential buyer based on

6   the intent data.

1   44.   The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central

2   server for storing the description of the item the potential buyer intends to purchase and

3   related information.

1   45.   The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one

2   of:

3   a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item

4   within the particular time period;

5   a degree of specificity with which the item is described;

6   a length of the particular time period;

7   a payment identifier;

8   a reputation of the potential buyer; and

9   demographic information associated with the potential buyer.

1   46.   The apparatus of claim 44, wherein the related information is based in part on the

2   reputation of the potential buyer, determined by at least one of:

3   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously provided intent data;

4   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously purchased items within

5   particular time periods;

6   a frequency with which the central server has received confirmation signals

7   associated with a potential buyer;

8   a frequency with which the potential buyer has previously incurred penalties;

9   types of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

10   costs of items previously purchased by the potential buyer;

11   a status of the financial account of the potential buyer; and

12   a value of demographic information of the potential buyer

1   47.   The method of claim 44, wherein the related information includes at least one of

2   address, income and age.

1   48.   The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central

2   server for storing intent data used to calculate the reward to issue to the potential buyer.

1   49.   The apparatus of claim 48, wherein the reward is determined based in part on a

2   rating assigned to each of a plurality of intent data, the intent data including at least one

3   of:

4   a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item

5   within the particular time period;

6   a degree of specificity with which the item is described;

7   a length of the particular time period;

8   a payment identifier; and

9   demographic information.

1   50.   The apparatus of claim 49, wherein a sum of the ratings corresponds to the reward

2   for which the potential buyer qualifies.

1   51.   The apparatus of claim 43 further comprising a database coupled to the central

2   server for storing a plurality of rewards.

1   52.   The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central

2   server for storing a potential buyer identifier and related information.

1   53.   The apparatus of claim 52, wherein the related information comprises one or more

2   of a payment identifier and a potential buyer name.

1   54.   The apparatus of claim 43, further comprising a database coupled to the central

2   server for storing a potential buyer identifier and penalty information.

1   55.   The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes one or more
2   of a reward identifier, an expiration of the particular time period, whether a confirmation
3   signal has been received indicating that the potential buyer has purchased the item, and a
4   penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the reward.

1   56.   The apparatus of claim 54, wherein the penalty information includes an expiration
2   of the particular time period and a penalty assessment corresponding to a value of the
3   reward.

1   57.   A central server system, comprising:
2   a processor;
3   a storage device coupled to the processor; and
4   software operative to run on the processor to issue a reward to a potential buyer in
5   exchange for demand information, the demand information including at least a
6   description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular time
7   period.

1   58.   The system of claim 57, wherein the demand information includes at least one of:
2   a potential buyer name;
3   a degree of certainty with which the potential buyer intends to purchase the item
4   within the particular time period;
5   a degree of specificity with which the item is described;
6   a length of the particular time period;
7   a payment identifier, a reputation of the potential buyer; and
8   demographic information associated with the buyer.

1   59.   The system of claim 57, wherein the storage device includes a database for storing
2   the demand information and related information.

1   60.   The system of claim 59, wherein the related information includes a corresponding

2   rating for each type of demand information.

1   61.   The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor

2   for storing a reward identifier and related information.

1   62.   The system of claim 61, wherein the related information includes a total rating

2   corresponding to the demand information and the reward identifier, and a reward

3   description corresponding to the reward identifier.

1   63.   The system of claim 57, further comprising a database coupled to the processor

2   for storing penalty information and related information.

1   64.   The system of claim 63, wherein the related information includes at least one of:

2   a payment identifier of the potential buyer;

3   an expiration time of the particular time period; and

4   a corresponding penalty.

1   65.   The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to

2   charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment

3   identifier of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does not purchase the item by the

4   expiration time.

1   66.   The system of claim 64, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to

2   charge the corresponding penalty to a financial account associated with the payment

3   identifier of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is not received by the expiration

4   time.

1   67.   The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more potential buyer devices

2   coupled to the processor and operable to allow potential buyers to input demand

3   information.

1   68.   The system of claim 67, wherein the potential buyer devices are operable to

2   display information about the reward.

1   69.   The system of claim 57, further comprising an output device for displaying

2   information about the reward.

1   70.   The system of claim 57, wherein the processor is coupled to a clock, a

2   communications port, an input device and an output device, and wherein the storage

3   device contains a demand information database, a reward database, and a penalty

4   database.

1   71.   The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to

2   charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if a confirmation signal is

3   not received within the particular time period.

1   72.   The system of claim 57, wherein the software is operable to direct the processor to

2   charge a penalty to a financial account of the potential buyer if the potential buyer does

3   not purchase the item within the particular time period.

1   73.   The system of claim 57, further comprising one or more seller devices coupled to

2   the controller and operable to allow sellers to retrieve demand information.

1   74.   A computer readable medium for directing a processor to perform the method of

2   claim 1.

1   75.   An information transmission medium for use in a potential buyer identification

2   system, the information transmission medium transmitting a computer program

3   comprising the processing steps of:

4   receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at

5   least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular

6   time period; and

7   determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.

1   76.   A computer data signal representative of controller instructions comprising the

2   processing steps of:

3   receiving intent data from a potential buyer, wherein the intent data includes at

4   least a description of an item the potential buyer intends to purchase within a particular

5   time period; and

6   determining a reward for the potential buyer based upon the intent data.